

MHR

Connections

Published by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission

Volume 6 Number 11

November 2006

"A great day for students"

2006 Winnipeg conference encourages students



After attending morning workshops and a plenary session, students from thirty different Manitoba High schools, got busy and worked on human rights banners to take a message of anti discrimination back to their schools and communities. While rock music played, students were given one hour to come up with a message and put it on a banner. Their material and tools consisted of felt, scissors, sparkle paint and a glue gun. After one hour, the students were amazed at how quickly a group can work together to promote human rights. Eventually, thirty banners carpeted the stage at the Franco Manitobain Culturel Centre. The session was hosted by the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre (WASAC).



The Manitoba Human Rights 6th Annual Winnipeg Youth Conference attracted students from as far away as Norway House. Heather York, the supervisor of the Helen Betty Osborne Education Centre's students, said it was worth the long trip. "I am so glad we came," she said, "it was worth every mile we drove."

The Norway House students joined almost two hundred students for a day of workshops. Ms York particularly liked the "Mission Possible Plenary Session" featuring the Pasternak twins who recently won a human right adjudication allowing them to try out for their high school boys' hockey team.

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The Rights Connection by Janet Baldwin - Chairperson Poor Commerce

Support for our recommendation that The Human Rights Code be amended to include protection from discrimination based on social disadvantage continues to grow. For example, the Manitoba Federation of Labour and the Manitoba Government Employees Union have passed resolutions in favour of this proposal.

This leads me to comment on a couple of recent media stories which underline how essential it is to consider all persons, including persons who are socially or economically disadvantaged, when providing services.

Salisbury House recently announced that it would no longer be accepting cash at its restaurants from 10:00 p.m. to 7 a.m. each night. Only credit, debit or gift card payments will be accepted, in the wake of recent robberies.

While this measure appears neutral, its impact may be greater for youth and low-income persons, who are less likely to have a debit or credit card. Any potentially discriminatory rule must be shown to be reasonably required in the circumstances.

A 1999 Report of the Canadian Community Reinvestment Coalition found that 8% of Canadians with an annual income of less than \$25,000 did not have a bank account. It identified barriers for low-income consumers in dealing with financial institutions, including: "...the number and nature of identification documents needed to open an account; arbitrary withholding of funds; increasing service charges; the disappearance of branches from some neighbourhoods; and a lack of consumer knowledge."

Given this, and the growing proliferation of payday loan stores and pawn shops, the opening of the Community Financial Services Centre in the North End of Winnipeg this month was most welcome. Clients of four Winnipeg inner city agencies will be referred to the Centre and assisted in opening an account with the Assiniboine Credit Union. In addition to the usual financial services, micro-loans as small as \$20 will be available, and the credit union's \$5 membership fee will be waived if it presents a barrier.

Such innovation in providing financial services to low-income persons was pioneered by Prof. Muhammad Yunus who founded the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Prof. Yunus shared this year's Nobel Peace Prize with the Grameen Bank.

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"I see those girls entirely differently now," she explained and added, "The issue and the twins were portrayed very differently in the papers."



Jesse and Amy Pasternak show students the Wolverine Jersey that the coaches of the West Kildonan Boys' Hockey team gave them. The back has 2006 printed on it to commemorate the year they fought for and won the right to try out for boys' high school hockey.

Many of the students agreed. "Before I thought they should play on the girls' team, but now I have changed my mind. After listening to them I think I would now have the courage to do it too," said one student from West Kildonan Collegiate.

Others appreciated having guest speakers their own age. Jesse and Amy Pasternak told them how and why they filed a human rights complaint and what happened over the following two years. Both admitted they never thought their complaint would go as far as a hearing, and were surprised by the intense media

coverage. They said however, it was worth it so that younger girls who want to play boys' high school hockey will now have a choice.

Students also participated in workshops. One called "Two Moccasins – Two Worlds" featured Ryan McMahon, one of the first Native graduates of the prestigious Second City of Toronto Conservatory. Ryan, who believes that laughter is the best medicine, spoke to the students about his own journey, which included denial and discovery about himself.



Students join BonaFide on stage as the hip hop duo entertained the conference participants over the lunch break.

Another workshop, "Standing By to Standing Up," gave the students an opportunity to improvise skits

involving discrimination and harassment. Props were provided as the students took on such roles as bullies, teachers, employees, principals and supervisors.

At the end of the day Jerry Woods, Vice Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Board of Commissioners and host of the conference, encouraged students to take back what they learned and challenged them to create a human rights project. Last year two Winnipeg schools, Daniel McIntyre Collegiate and Miles Macdonell Collegiate, responded to his challenge and hosted human rights events at their schools. Both schools received cash prizes and certificates of achievement for their work.

Community groups discuss bias-free policing

Service met recently at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission for a round table discussion on bias-free policing.

The Commission announced the establishment of the Racialized Communities and Police Services Project (the "RCAPS Project"), a partnership with researchers from the University of Winnipeg to examine concerns brought to the Commission about police services to Aboriginal residents of a Winnipeg neighbourhood.

The RCAPS Project Committee has developed a number of project proposals to help identify any problems in the provision of policing services to Aboriginal and visible minority communities, and to assist in developing strategies that support bias-free policing services.

In open discussion at the round table meeting, various community groups stressed the importance of anti-racism education, and the need for more police service resources for cross-cultural training and community outreach. They shared stories from their communities about experiences with the police. Winnipeg Chief of Police Jack Ewatski said, "I do not need to be convinced that mistrust exists between some community members and some members of the Winnipeg Police Service. I see this round table as an opportunity to obtain advice and guidance from the community to help find ways to alleviate that mistrust."

It was also agreed that it would be valuable for all the groups represented to meet periodically and share information, focusing on strategies to address reports or perceptions of bias in police services to racialized communities.

Grant applications to various funding bodies have been made for the RCAPS project. One grant already received will enable the committee to hold neighbourhood consultations to gather information from individuals about police services to members of racialized communities.

The roundtable discussion was the third in a series of public consultations held by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. The mandate of the Commission is to achieve equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination through the protection and promotion of human rights.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties will present the **Annual Human Rights Commitment Award and the Dr. Sybil Shack Memorial Human Rights Youth Award** on December 8, 2006, in recognition of International Human Rights Day.

This year's Commitment award recognizes activities which encourage youth awareness, knowledge and involvement in human rights. The youth award recognizes work that has had an impact on the advancement of human rights.

**York the Hotel
December 8, 2006
Tickets \$25.00**

For ticket information call Beatrice Watson at 945-7653